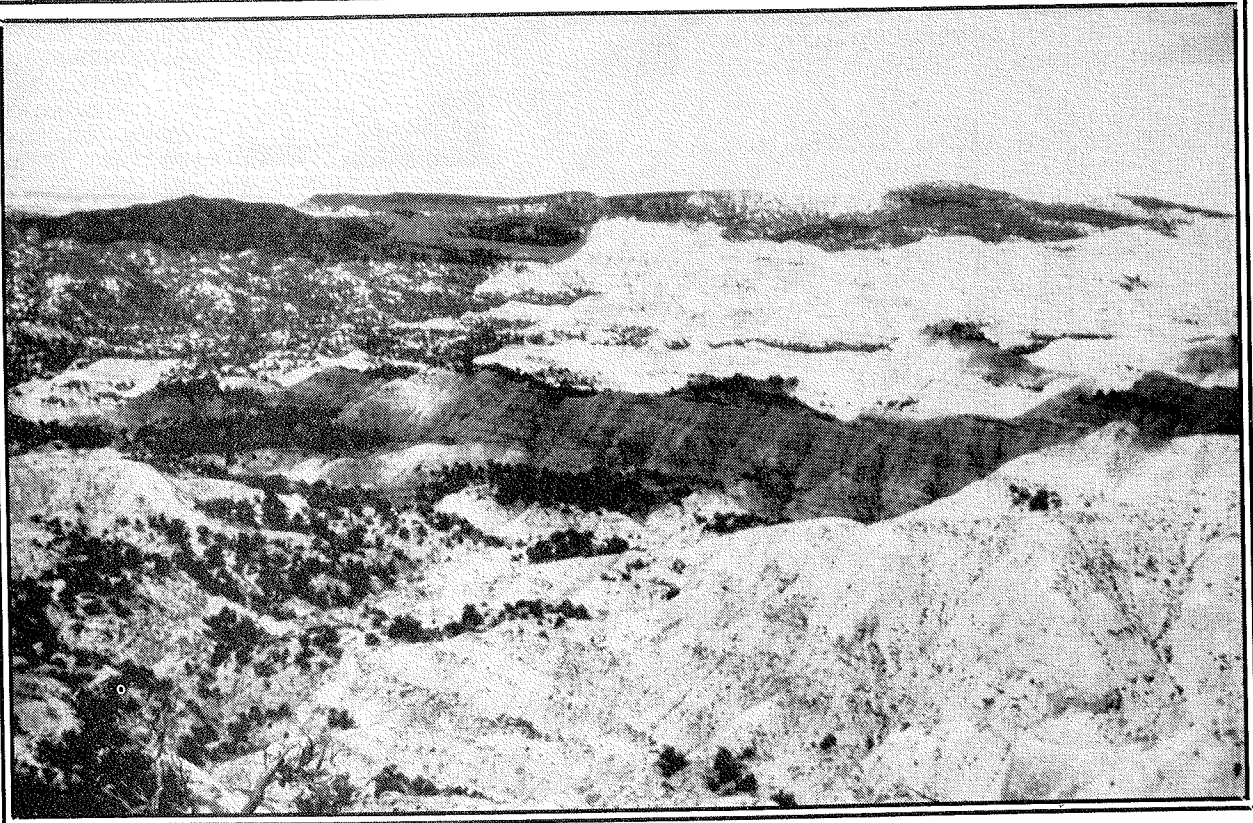


The Blues

WSA



THE BLUES WSA

T. 35 S.

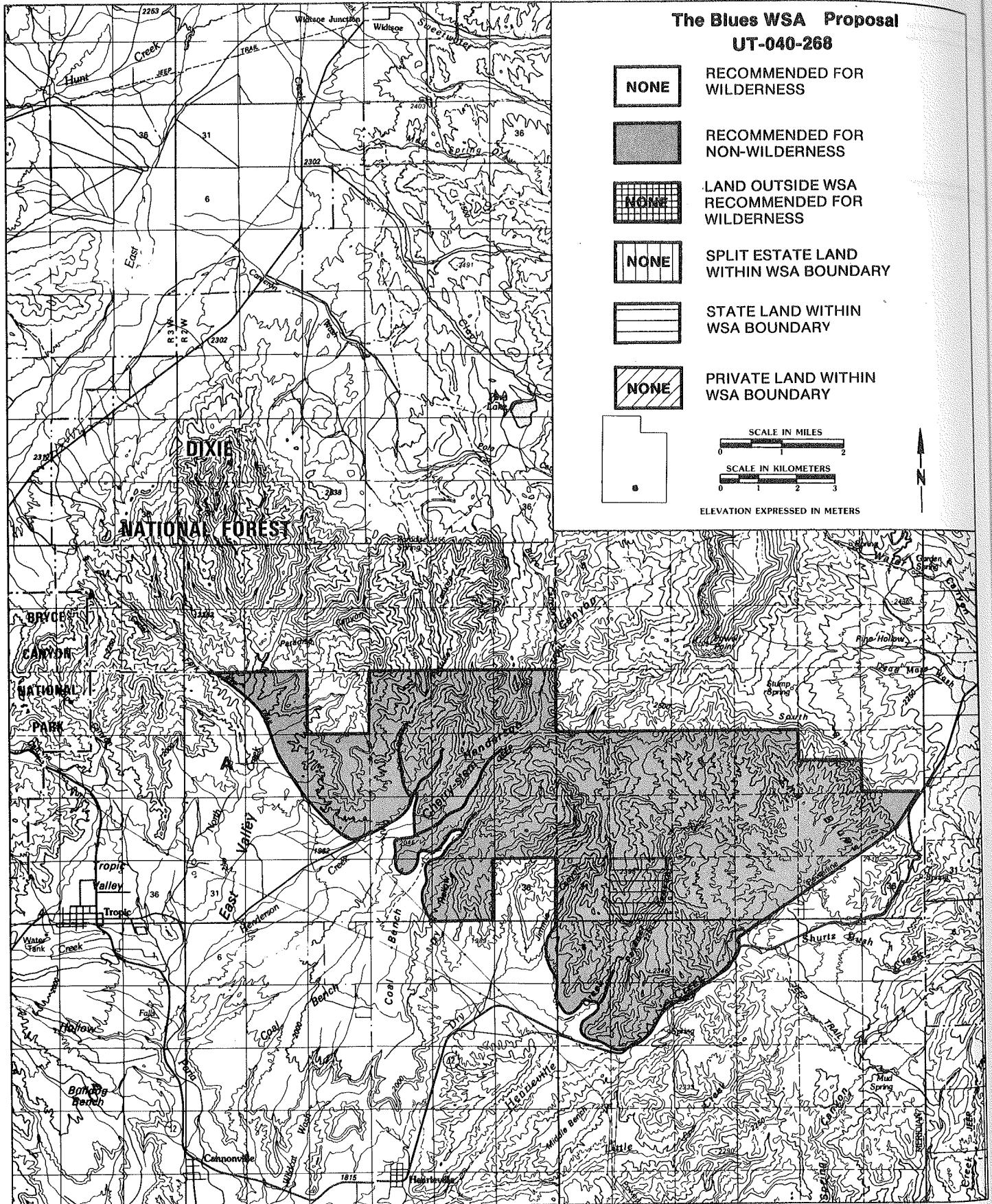
T. 36 S.

T. 37 S.

R. 2 W.

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October 1991



THE BLUES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA: 19,030 acres

The Blues Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-040-268) is in southern Garfield County, about 5 miles northeast of Henrieville, Utah (population 167). The WSA is 6 miles from north to south and 11 miles wide, from east to west, along the northern boundary (see Map). It includes 19,030 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). One section (640 acres) of State land, but no private or split-estate lands are inheld within the WSA (see Table 1). Bryce Canyon National Park is about 10 to 15 miles west of the WSA. The WSA is bordered by the Dixie National Forest on the north and east for about 10.5 miles, by State Highway 12 and a powerline on the southeast for about 10 miles, and by roads, ways, and non-Federal land on the south and west (see Map).

Mud Spring Canyon WSA (UT-040-077) is adjacent to the southeast, separated from The Blues WSA by State Highway 12.

Elevation ranges from 6,400 feet at the western edge of the WSA to 8,200 feet near the National Forest boundary, on the northwest. Cliffs, hills, and the blue-gray shale badlands for which the WSA is named, characterize the study area. The dominant vegetation is pinyon-juniper woodland with a sparse understory.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990.

TABLE 1
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA

WITHIN THE WSA	ACRES
BLM (surface and subsurface)	19,030
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	640
Total	19,030
WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY	
BLM (within the WSA)	0
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	0
In-holdings (State, private)	0
WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	
BLM	19,030
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	19,030
In-holdings (State, Private)	640

Source: BLM File Data

THE BLUES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness (no action) alternative, which is the recommendation in this report, and an all wilderness alternative.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

0 acres

(recommended for wilderness)

19,030 acres

(recommended for nonwilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to release the entire area for uses other than wilderness. Designation of the entire area as wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The alternative selected, however, would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

BLM believes that the long-term potential for coal development outweighs the wilderness values of the WSA. The WSA contains an estimated 270 million tons of coal, about half of which could be recovered by underground mining. Some potential also exists for the discovery of small amounts of oil and gas.

Although exploration and development of coal and possibly of oil and gas is not expected in the short term, in view of the long term potential and the relatively low quality of wilderness values, The Blues should not be designated as wilderness. Wilderness designation would curtail mineral development.

Under existing laws and regulations, all special status plant and animal species and cultural resources would be protected.

The Blues WSA does not include high scenic qualities and only 8 and 16 percent of the study area include areas with outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, respectively.

Current nonmotorized recreational use is estimated to be only 10 visitor days annually.

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. The appearance of naturalness in the WSA is influenced by the proximity of the study area to the Table Cliffs plateau and amphitheater on the adjacent Dixie National Forest. Much of the badlands area is immediately below the pink escarpment of the Table Cliffs. West of Henderson Canyon, the cliffs and buttes are an extension of formations on the National Forest. The perception of naturalness gained by sightseers and hiking visitors to the WSA is that of WSA natural scenes serving as foreground to and in combination with a larger natural area in the Table Cliffs region. The criteria for naturalness are substantially met on more than 99 percent of the WSA. The only imprints of human activity are about 5 miles of way and 4 miles of fence, affecting less than 1 percent of the study area.

B. Solitude

A total of about 1,600 acres (8 percent of the WSA) include scattered areas that provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. These areas are all small and are in the western portion of the WSA, in the northern part near the boundary with Dixie National Forest, a portion of the east side of Henderson Canyon, the central portion, and an area in the Blues badlands.

The remaining 17,430 acres (92 percent) of the WSA do not provide opportunities for visitors to avoid the sights, sounds, and evidence of others. Sights and sounds of human activities are not generally present in or from most places in the WSA, however. An exception is on the elevated south rim of the Blues amphitheater, where sights and sounds of trucks on the steep grades of Highway 12 and activities at a nearby oil docking facility could detract from the feeling of solitude.

THE BLUES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Approximately 3,000 acres, or 16 percent, of the WSA include outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation. Diverse activities for which there are exceptional opportunities are hiking, backpacking, rock climbing, hunting, and sightseeing.

Opportunities for hiking and hunting exist throughout the WSA, and there are few if any parts of the WSA where these activities could not be pursued. Rock climbing, on the other hand, is limited to three sites on sheer sandstone cliffs, and the most interesting botanical sightseeing is limited to plant associations in The Blues badlands.

Backpacking and geological sightseeing opportunities are in the same locations. Opportunities for backpacking exist because the complete range of stratigraphy and variety of landforms in the WSA cannot be seen in a day's hike, for example. Some backpacking and geological sightseeing involve traversing parts of Dixie National Forest and the inheld State section. Excellent opportunities for exploration are also found in certain remote and dissected parts of the WSA.

The remaining 16,030 acres (84 percent of the WSA) do not exhibit outstanding opportunities for recreation.

D. Special Features

Peregrine falcons, an endangered species, may visit or inhabit the WSA. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) candidate threatened or endangered animal species that may be found in the WSA include the ferruginous hawk, Swainson's hawk, southern spotted owl, long-billed curlew, white-faced ibis, and Great Basin Silverspot butterfly. The golden eagle, a BLM sensitive species, may also occur in the study area.

One plant species which is eligible to be listed and that may grow in the WSA is Lepidium montanum var. stellae.

FWS candidate plant species which may occur in the WSA are Lepidium montanum var. neeseae, Heterotheca jonesii, Coryphantha missouriensis var marstonii,

and Psoralea pariensis. Xylorhiza confertifolia, considered by some to be a sensitive species, may also grow in the WSA. The known and potential habitats for all these special status species extends beyond the WSA boundaries.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add a combination of potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystems not presently represented in Utah or in the NWPS. PNV is the vegetation that would develop in an area if not disturbed by human activities. The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion, and the PNV would be juniper-pinyon woodland. Because of conditions in the WSA, however, juniper-pinyon woodland probably would never cover more than 40 percent (7,600 acres) of the surface.

Juniper-pinyon woodland PNV is represented nationally in the NWPS, is well represented in BLM study areas both in and outside of Utah, and is represented in one wilderness, the Box-Death Hollow Wilderness in the Dixie National Forest in Utah.

This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is within a 5-hour drive of the Provo-Orem, Utah, standard metropolitan statistical area. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated wilderness and other BLM study areas within a 5-hour drive of this population center.

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Blues WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS. As of January, 1987, the NWPS included 64 wilderness areas comprising 2,834,115 acres in Utah and Arizona.

THE BLUES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

TABLE 2
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION

BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	11	1,401,745	84	2,124,168
UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	1	26,000	53	1,687,168

Source: BLM File Data.

TABLE 3
WILDERNESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS OF MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS

POPULATION CENTERS	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
Provo-Orem, Utah	11	721,793	90	2,767,838

Source: BLM File Data.

Twelve designated wilderness areas are within 100 miles of the WSA. In a clockwise direction beginning to the northeast, are the 26,000-acre Box-Death Hollow Wilderness (Forest Service [FS]), the 112,000-acre Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness (BLM), the 6,860-acre Cottonwood Point Wilderness (BLM), the 70,500-acre Kanab Creek Wilderness (FS and BLM units), the 40,600-acre Saddle Mountain Wilderness (FS), the 7,880-acre Mt. Trumbull Wilderness (BLM), the 14,650-acre Mt. Logan Wilderness (BLM), the 18,630-acre Beaver Dam Mountains Wilderness (BLM), the 87,900-acre Paiute Wilderness (BLM), the 37,300-acre Grand Wash Cliffs Wilderness (BLM), the 7,000-acre Ashdown Gorge Wilderness, and the 50,000-acre Pine Valley Mountain Wilderness (FS).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character.)

The Blues WSA could be effectively managed as wilderness. There are 70 acres of coal lease and 480 acres of oil and gas leases in the WSA, but it is expected

that these leases would expire and would not be renewed. There are no mining claims in the WSA and development of locatable minerals is not projected in the foreseeable future.

Livestock grazing and maintenance of 4 miles of fence would continue, and would not significantly affect the wilderness values of the WSA. There is one section (640 acres) of State land inheld in the WSA. Because of the known coal resources in the WSA, it is projected that about 1 mile of new access road to the State land would be required through the area following wilderness designation. Additionally, any coal mining operations on the State lands would reduce wilderness values on the adjacent wilderness.

Energy and Mineral Resource Values

Because the WSA is not recommended for wilderness designation, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) did not prepare a mineral assessment report for the area. According to BLM geologists, the potential for coal resources is high. The WSA

THE BLUES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

is in the Kaiparowits Known Recoverable Coal Resource Area (KRCRA). Up to 270 million tons of coal, about half of which is recoverable by underground mining, are within the WSA at depths of 1,000 to 3,000 feet beneath the surface. The coal is of moderate quality, with an average heat value of 11,683 Btu's and low sulfur content.

Favorability that oil and gas resources are within the WSA is moderate for medium size deposits in the north-central part of the study area and for small deposits in the remainder of the WSA, but the degree of certainty that these exist is low.

The potential for recoverable deposits of metallic minerals is low. Small deposits of stream gravel and other loose rock in the WSA are usable in construction but are not economically significant because of ample supplies of similar materials elsewhere in the vicinity.

Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 4) summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

With BLM's recommendation, the WSA would not be designated as wilderness but would be released for other uses. The recommended action would not result in a loss of local employment or income. Opportunity to explore and develop mineral and energy resources would remain as at present. Oil and gas leasing would be open on 18,550 acres which are currently not leased, and exploration could occur. The effects on local economy would be relatively minor and temporary. Total employment would not exceed 40 and would last about 2 years.

Coal leasing would be open on 18,960 acres. No coal mining is anticipated in the short term, but exploration and mining could occur in the next 30 years. If coal mining occurs, the effects on the local economy would be significant, but it cannot be predicted whether one or more mines would be within the WSA boundaries.

Livestock-related economic conditions would not change, because there would be no effect on livestock grazing management. Recreation-related local expenditures directly attributable to the use of the WSA would not be significant to the local economy.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 42 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 53 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statements by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs.

In general, 30 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 20 commenters were opposed. Three commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS, but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the special features in the WSA and opportunities for primitive recreation. The majority of those commenting were from outside of Utah.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that enough wilderness has already been designated and more wilderness would harm State and local economies, and that mineral exploration and development would be precluded. Most of those commenting in favor of wilderness were from outside the state, but a significant number of those opposed to wilderness designation were from rural Utah.

Three Federal agencies, the FS, USBM, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) commented on the Draft EIS. The FS

THE BLUES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

stated that the Dixie National Forest concurs with the recommendation to not propose wilderness in the WSA. The USBM did not take a position regarding designation or nondesignation but commented that BLM had understated the petroleum potential of the WSA. The EPA took no formal position on wilderness designation but suggested that an estimate be developed to evaluate the long-term coal development feasibility of the WSA as the potential for coal development may not be a real factor in recommending the area as unsuitable.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There is one section (640 acres) of State land in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation of the WSA. The State believes that the relatively low-quality wilderness values found in the WSA are not significant enough to override the relatively high degree of conflicts. The conflicts do not seem to be resolvable by boundary adjustment. The State suggests that a scenic area or Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) designation would help preserve the scenic values of the badlands.

The Garfield County Commission is opposed to wilderness designation of The Blues WSA and has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah. Garfield County previously proposed to the Utah Congressional Delegation that 111,053 acres of BLM lands in three WSAs and 31,600 acres in one FS unit in the county be recommended as wilderness. The Garfield County Master Plan recommends that the remaining lands in the county, including the Blues WSA, be retained for multiple uses.

THE BLUES WSA

Table 4
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topic	Alternatives	
	Recommendation No Action/No Wilderness	All Wilderness (19,030 Acres)
Impacts on Wilderness Values	Wilderness values would not be protected by wilderness designation and loss would occur as intrusions increase. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 681 acres due to rangeland and leasable mineral developments. During the period of activity, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to 2,855 acres. Special features would not be significantly affected. Continued and increased vehicular use of the existing way and future roads would detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.	Wilderness values would be preserved overall. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on about 1 acre and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to 760 acres. Special features would be preserved.
Impacts on Vegetation	Special status plant species would not be significantly affected. The 681 acres of projected surface disturbance would affect less than 4 percent of the pinyon-juniper woodland and sagebrush types in the WSA.	Implementation of the All Wilderness Alternative would not affect the vegetation resource in the WSA. Special status plant species would be protected.
Impacts on Mineral and Energy Exploration and Production	Implementation of the No Action/No Wilderness Alternative would not adversely affect mineral exploration or production.	Wilderness designation would preclude or severely constrain potential exploration and development of significant deposits of oil, gas, and coal. Loss or exploration and development opportunities for other mineral and energy resources would not be significant.

THE BLUES WSA

Table 4 (Continued)
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topic	Alternatives	
	Recommendation No Action/No Wilderness	All Wilderness (19,030 Acres)
Impacts on Wildlife Habitat and Populations	Wildlife would not be significantly affected by this alternative in the foreseeable future. Big game habitat would be improved on vegetation treatment areas. Threatened, endangered, or other special status species would not be significantly affected.	Wilderness designation would preclude 600 acres of vegetation treatments designed to improve big game habitat and livestock forage, but would provide all species with additional opportunities for solitude.
Impacts on Livestock Management	Implementation of the No Action/No Wilderness Alternative would not adversely affect current livestock management practices in the WSA. The proposed vegetation treatments would be allowed which would provide up to 56 AUMs of additional livestock forage.	Wilderness designation would not significantly affect current livestock management practices. However, restricting motorized use of the 5 miles of way could increase management costs and inconvenience permittees. The opportunity for an increase of 56 AUMs through vegetation treatments would be foregone.
Impacts on Economic Conditions	No loss of local employment or income occur. Federal and State revenues would not be reduced. Economic opportunities could be realized through mineral and energy resource exploration and eventual development in the long-term future. Local communities would be significantly affected.	Wilderness designation would not significantly affect present local or regional economic conditions. However, new leasing in the WSA would not be allowed; therefore, potential future sales and revenues from leasable minerals (oil, gas, and coal) would be foregone. Any beneficial or adverse affects from long term development of oil, gas, and coal would not occur.